News release

Met Office forecasts improving at a world-beating rate

26 April 2005

Weather experts at the Met Office are reaping the rewards of years of investment, as new figures comparing the relative performance of national weather service computer forecasting models around the world, show the Met Office performing impressively against its global rivals.

The massive new NEC SX-6 supercomputer came on-stream at the Met Office in spring 2004, since then forecast accuracy has climbed substantially. The data — which compare the output from the world's five leading national weather services — show that the accuracy of Met Office forecasts for the northern hemisphere has improved by around 11% since the introduction of the new supercomputer. This compares with an historic improvement across all modelling centres of around 3% per year.

The first, most important steps in getting accurate weather forecasts to the person on the street, are being able to use all available observational data such as that from satellites etc. as well as having the best computer models. The weather forecaster then adds to or modifies the computer output as necessary to produce the most accurate, reliable and timely forecasts possible. It is the combination of improving computer models and top-class forecasters which has led to these improvements.

The Met Office brought online even more nodes for the NEC SX-8 supercomputer on 12 April 2005, which doubled its capacity. This enables new models of the atmosphere to be used, which can better simulate the complex physical processes that occur on a daily basis. These models will have a much higher resolution and, hence, the ability to handle the small-scale weather features which have a high impact on us all.

Roger Hunt, Chief Operating Officer at the Met Office said: "We need to continually improve our forecasts to meet the growing expectations of the public and our other customers. The improvements will continue as we produce more and more detailed forecasts in the future. We are world beating and intend to stay that way".

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